

## THE TRADITION OF BLESSING EASTER BASKETS

Among the customs which have been passed down from our Carpatho-Rusyn ancestors and other Slavic groups is the blessing of food at Easter (*Velykden*). The reason for this tradition is that originally the people kept a very strict fast during Lent, not eating any meat or dairy products for the forty days. At the end of the Great Fast the Carpatho-Rusyns showed their joy and gratitude by taking such food items that they had not eaten for so long to church to be blessed. This solemn blessing of food took place after the Resurrection Services. The paschal foods (*svjačenyina*) traditionally blessed for Easter, the Feast of the Lord's Passover from Death to Life, are the foods which God prescribed for the ancient Passover meal — lamb, bread, wine and bitter herbs. These foods are representative of the spiritual feast that awaits us at Christ's table.

The contents of the Easter basket have particular significance and fall into three main categories:

Easter Bread referred to as "Pascha", representing Christ the living bread.

Meat Products such as ham, veal, pork, lamb are representative of the sacrificial animals of the Old Testament.

Dairy Products such as butter, cheese, cooked eggs, decorated eggs (*pysanký*). These items are symbolic of prosperity and peace.

(Other items such as salt, horseradish, beets, vinegar and sour cream may be included)

The foods to be blessed are prepared the day

before Easter and are carefully placed in a wicker basket. The basket is covered with a richly embroidered scarf or towel (*ručnyk*) often having the words, "**Christos Voskrese**" ("Christ is Risen"). The family then takes the basket to church where a candle placed in the basket is lighted during the blessing ceremony.

After the Resurrection Services there is great joy

among the people as they greet each other in saying, "**Christos Voskrese!**" and the reply is, "**Voistinnu Voskrese!**" ("Christ Is Risen!" and the reply is, "Indeed He Is Risen!"). Each family returns to the home and partakes of the blessed food. The meal begins with the head of the family dividing one blessed egg into several portions, one for each member of the family, giving it to each one saying, "**Christos Voskrese!**"

### ASSEMBLING A TRADITIONAL EASTER BASKET

One begins with a straw basket filling with foods each holding symbolic significance:

#### 1. Pascha - Easter Bread

A sweet yeast bread rich in eggs and butter, symbolic of Christ "the Living Bread". Usually a round loaf with a golden crust and decorated with a braid and cross. Pascha comes from the word Pasch, meaning Passover. In English we use it to refer to the Easter season. In Slavonic the word paska is used to refer to Christ "the new lamb".

#### 2. Hrudka - Easter Cheese

A special cheese made from egg and milk shaped into a ball having a rather bland but sweet taste indicative of the moderation that Christians should have in all things. It is often decorated with cloves in the form of a cross.

#### 3. Šunka - Ham

The meat popular with the Slavs as the main dish because of its richness and symbolism of the great joy and abundance of Easter. Some

may prefer lamb or veal.

#### 4. Kolbasi - Sausage

A spicy pork product flavored with garlic, indicative of God's favor and generosity.

#### 5. Maslo - Butter

This favorite dairy product is often shaped into a lamb or small cross. Symbolic of Christ the lamb who was offered upon the altar of the



Cross for the life of the world.

6. Slanina - Bacon

Uncooked bacon cured with spices.  
Symbolic of the overabundance of God's mercy to us.

7. Sol - Salt

Symbolizes the Truth of the message of Christ. Just as salt preserves food, so the teaching of Christ preserves our eternal life.

8. Chrin - Horseradish

Horseradish mixed with grated red beets. Symbolic of the Passion of Christ still in our minds but sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection. A bittersweet red colored mixture reminds us of the sufferings of Christ.

9. Pysankŷ - Decorated Eggs

Hard boiled eggs brightly decorated with symbols and markings made with beeswax. Eggs were always considered as symbols of the resurrection, the emergence of new life.



## RESURRECTION TROPARION

*“Christos Voskrese Iz Mertvych!  
Smertiju Smert’ Poprav;  
I Suščim Vo Hrob’ich Život Darovav.”*

*“Christ Is Risen From The Dead!  
By Death He Conquered Death;  
And To Those In The Graves  
He Granted Life.”*



**Христось Воскресе!**

*Christos Voskrese!*

*Voistinu Voskrese!*

## THE TRADITION OF BLESSING EASTER BASKETS



**САРАТНО-РУСИН СОСІЕТУ**  
**Cleveland Chapter**

[www.c-rs.org](http://www.c-rs.org)